

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Randall Robinson

PERSON

Robinson, Randall, 1941-

**Alternative Names:** Randall Robinson;

**Life Dates:** July 6, 1941-March 24, 2023

**Place of Birth:** Richmond , Virginia, USA

**Residence:** Basseterre, St. Kitts

**Occupations:** Human Rights Advocate; Law Professor; Author

## Biographical Note

Human rights advocate, author, and law professor Randall Robinson was born on July 6, 1941 in Richmond, Virginia to Maxie Cleveland Robinson and Doris Robinson. He graduated from Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia in 1959; attended Norfolk State College in Norfolk, Virginia; and during his junior year, entered the U.S. Army. Robinson earned his B.A. in sociology from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia in 1967, prior to receiving his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1970.

In his final year of law school, Robinson cofounded the Southern Africa Relief Fund, and after graduation, worked as a Ford Foundation fellow in Tanzania, East Africa. Upon his return to the United States, he worked as a civil rights attorney at the Boston Legal Assistance Project until 1975, when he served as speech writer in the office of Missouri Congressman Bill Clay. He worked as a staff attorney for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights in 1976, prior to serving as administrative assistant, i.e. chief of staff, in the office of Michigan Congressman Charles Diggs.

In 1977, Robinson founded TransAfrica Forum to promote enlightened U.S. policies toward Africa and the Caribbean. He served as the organization's president until 2001, when he and his wife, Hazel, moved to St. Kitts. In 2008, Robinson was named a Distinguished Scholar in Residence by The Pennsylvania State University Dickinson School of Law, where he taught human rights law until 2016.

Robinson was a best-selling author, with his works including *Defending the Spirit: A Black Life in America*; *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*; *The Reckoning – What Blacks Owe to Each Other*; *Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from His Native Land*; *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping*

of a President; and two novels: *The Emancipation of Wakefield Clay* and *MAKEDA*.

Some nineteen universities conferred honorary Ph.D.'s upon Robinson in recognition of his work in the area of social justice advocacy, and he was honored by the United Nations, the Congressional Black Caucus, Harvard University, Essence, ABC News (Person of the Week), The Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Change, the NAACP, and Ebony, among others. The Government of South Africa in 2012 conferred upon him the highest honor permissible to a non-citizen of South Africa, in recognition of his efforts to end apartheid. And the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, New York, named him a 2017 medalist in honor of his work in the area of human rights.

Robinson presented his views and policy recommendations on Nightline, CNN, CBS Evening News, CBS Sunday Morning, Face the Nation, Democracy Now, NPR, NBC Nightly News, ABC's World News Tonight, The Today Show, C-Span, The Tavis Smiley Show, The Charlie Rose Show, and other leading American television programs.

Robinson had two children, Anike Robinson and Jabari Robinson, from his first marriage. He and his wife, Hazel Ross-Robinson, were the parents of one daughter, Khalea Ross Robinson.

Randall Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 13, 2017.

Randall Robinson passed away on March 24, 2023 at the age of 81.

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